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LETTER

ADDRESSED TO THE

LORD EBRINGTON,

ON HIS PROPOSED

PETITION TO THE LORD CHANCELLOR

RESPECTING THE

PATRONAGE OF THE SMALL LIVINGS

AT HIS LORDSHIP'S DISPOSAL.

By CLERICUS.

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LETTER,

&c.

MY LORD,

I USE no apology for addressing you on a public measure originating with you. The interest which I, as one of the public, have in your proceeding, entitles me to this freedom. The sincere respect which I entertain for you will, I trust, ensure that I shall so express myself as to avoid giving you ground of personal offence.

Lord Brougham, upon acceding to his present office, voluntarily invited the bishops to recommend fit persons to all livings in the patronage of the Crown, in their respective dioceses, which should be below the annual value of 200*l.*

He could only be induced to this course by the conviction that such preferment would be, under the circumstances, bestowed by them more usefully for the advancement of religion, than it could be by his own appointment; owing to his necessary want of acquaintance with the officiating clergy.

The motive was excellent; the sacrifice generous. They gained him the respect and admiration of all the reflecting portion of the community.

Some members of the government are understood to have objected to the measure, from the effect it might have on their political influence. *They* had, perhaps, some right to do so. But the Chancellor persisted, and, in my opinion, wisely persisted, in his intention.

I do not mean to assert that the bishops are invariably the best patrons, in the disposal of the preferment belonging to them. In some instances, it has been unhappily far otherwise. On the whole, however, they would probably bear a favourable comparison with any other class of patrons. Their higher responsibility would naturally lead to some superiority. But, whatever may be thought on this point, it can hardly be questioned that a power of *mere recommendation,* thus placed in their hands by the Chancellor, liable to suspension or revocation, would be wisely and honestly exercised. They would be aware that an eye was upon them, whose vigilance few things escape. When, moreover, the limited value of the preferment thus entrusted to the disposal of the bishops, is taken into consideration, perhaps no scheme could be devised, which would so completely ensure its

right appropriation. That such was the Chancellor's opinion is proved by his conduct: for the propriety and expected popularity of the measure could only be founded on its obvious usefulness.

If this be true, then it rests with those who would raise an obstacle to such an arrangement, either to avow their disregard to the interests of religion, or to assign a motive for their conduct of superior importance.

You, my Lord, have made yourself liable to such a challenge. You have been for some time busily employed in soliciting *members of the House of Commons to sign a petition to the Lord Chancellor, to revoke this his concession to the bishops.*

Now, my Lord, I well know that you will spurn the imputation of a disregard to religion. I believe that few persons have a more sincere attachment to it. You have then to assign for a proceeding at variance with its interests, a motive founded on considerations of higher importance.

The reasoning by which your Lordship is said to justify your attempt to abrogate this arrangement adopted by the Chancellor for the benefit of religion, is, *that the patronage devolving to the Crown ought not to be employed by him for such an object, at his best discretion; but to be used solely*

for the purpose of strengthening the ministry of which he is a member.

What, my Lord, is it by a Whig and a Reformer that we are to be told, that the Church patronage of the Crown is then employed against the spirit of the constitution, when it is not employed for the sole end of obtaining votes in the House of Commons, but diverted—I had almost said *perverted*—to the promotion of Christian piety? Is this the doctrine to be delivered from the cathedra of Reform; that a Chancellor is liable to a remonstrance of the House of Commons, almost to an impeachment, for not making his Church patronage an engine for the perpetuation of his political power? It is a mere subterfuge to say that the petition is of *private individuals,* when none but members of the House are invited to concur in it, and the petition is expected to have weight only from the importance of their votes. If such be the only legitimate application of the patronage of the Crown, what has been the meaning of the long outcry against such use of it, and the motive for curtailing it in every department? Your Lordship is not surely one of those political moralists, who think principle only useful in an opponent; that right and wrong change characters in different hands; and, that what was pronounced infamous in a Tory, becomes virtue in a Whig? It is not, at any rate, my

Lord, with such views that *the country* has sought Reform. It is not to have corruption administered by Whig instead of Tory; by Republican instead of Royalist. If this be all the Reform you contemplate, the country will rise again, and shake you off.

Perhaps the Chancellor may not be insensible to the interests of his party; but, with wiser and larger views, may think that he best promotes those interests by conciliating public opinion, through the virtuous and disinterested exercise of power. The country gives him credit for wisdom; it looks to him with confidence; and it is by no means prepared to see him consigned to the leading-strings of an irresponsible cabal.

But, my Lord, *with you* it will not be enough to justify your proceeding on constitutional grounds. I have a right to demand, from a man of your character, who derive some of your importance with the public from that character, to show that the motive by which you are influenced is superior to any interest that religion can have in this question. I have little concern with politics; little attachment to political parties; I see none adhere to public principles. I call upon you, as a member of this great community, avowing myself alive to its true interests, which I believe to be materially affected by the spread or hinderance of genuine religion.

But, my Lord, while I urge this as my main ground and consideration, I am not ignorant that there are are other principles, to which it is difficult to reconcile your petition. And, if I am not misinformed, your applications to some whom you would allow to be among the most honourable and enlightened of your own political friends, have been met, not only with a direct refusal, but with cogent argumentation and earnest remonstrance; that they have urged upon you, that an interference, on the part of a knot of members of the House of Commons, with the distribution of the legal patronage of the Crown, is in direct hostility to the spirit of the British constitution; that it is an encroachment of most perilous example. The power of the Crown is exposed, at the present moment, to dangerous dilapidation. One organ of the party with which you are associated, has been demanding, at its pleasure, the displacement of the Commander-in-chief of the army; another, of the members of the diplomatic missions; and you, my Lord, are laying the foundation for the usurpation, by the House of Commons, of the *Church* patronage of the Crown. For to such a result your petition is obviously a prelude.

I do not mean that you contemplate such a result. But in all civil commotions, the most mischievous agents are, short-sighted men, of high character for integrity, who, instigated by others

with longer foresight but less honest purposes, are made instruments for accomplishing objects which they do not suspect themselves, and to which the public are blinded by a reliance on their virtues. I think that the character of those who are said to have objected to your scheme, and the nature of their objections, should have suggested to your mind the possibility of some impropriety in it, which you had overlooked.

There is another ground of objection which I should have supposed to have weight with one who, in all the private relations of life, is a model of every thing that is honourable, gentlemanly, and refined. I feel, however, that I am coming to difficult ground—difficult, not from a want of justice in my views, but of sympathy in my readers. Bishops, now-a-days, are looked upon as only fair objects for obloquy and calumny. The rule of candour and justice toward them, is, to think the worst possible of them on every occasion—then to affirm it—then to act upon it. But, my Lord, I, who though somewhat of a Reformer, have not yet brought myself to think it right to treat persons of their education, habits, and station in society, with injustice and contumely, merely because I shall be sure to have the temporary cry of the mob at my back; I feel that it may in some degree affect the character of your proceeding, if it shall seem to cast a wanton and gratuitous insult upon that body.

Now, my Lord, the bishops never sought the privilege bestowed upon them by the Chancellor; some of them did not wish for it, from the unpleasant imputations to which it might expose them; some of them even hesitate to use it; none of them have abused it; *can* abuse it. You will not, I am sure, make any such charge. Has, then, the Chancellor a right to tender a privilege spontaneously to them, for excellent and sufficient motives; to reap the merited honour due to his disinterestedness; and then formally to withdraw such privilege, uniformly exercised for the useful ends for which he gave it; and thus furnish occasion to impute to those on whom he conferred it, that they had abused it, and were unfit to retain it? Such would be the necessary inference from the conduct you recommend to him. And if such a proceeding would be in him in the highest degree unjust, in what degree is their culpability less who seek to force upon him its adoption? Neither would his fault be lessened by your association with it. Dishonour is not diminished by being shared: it extends in plenary and unmitigated intensity, like an electric shock, to the whole circle consenting to it.

No man can doubt that there is a settled hostility to all religion, on the part of many of those with whom you act politically. The temper of the population of this country is not ripe for the safe manifestation of such feeling. The assault

must be begun, as it always has been, by holding up the ministers of religion to contempt. This proceeding of yours is one act of a series for this purpose. You would, I know, shrink from the result they contemplate, with abhorrence; but you lend, in the mean while, the sanction of your respectable name to the means they employ to arrive at it.

But the Reform Bill is carried. Where then the necessity for this measure? Has not the government public opinion with it? The power parted with by the Chancellor cannot be employed against you. You cannot want the little strength it would add, in your hands. Surely the attempt at a right exercise of this patronage needs not to be stifled in its birth; stifled too by the unnatural violence of those, who have taught us to look for purity of administration in every department, as the coming offspring of their long and painful labour.

I have the honour to be,

My Lord,

Your obedient servant,

CLERICUS.

THE END.

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